



Can you get help from the **Alzheimer's Caregiver Support Program**?

If you care for someone who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Lewy Body or other dementia or memory loss

- * the help you receive can be whatever is most helpful to you as the caregiver
- * the help can be regular, intermittent, or just once
- * training and support groups are available

~ Eligibility requirements do NOT include assets and any disease related expenses can be deducted from your income. To find out if you are eligible call the ADRC and ask for caregiver support.



My Favorite Caregiver Tips

If you've been reading this newsletter regularly you have probably noticed that every "favorite caregiver tips" column has ***Take time to laugh.*** as one of the tips. This is my absolute favorite caregiver tip, and here is why:

According to the Mayo Clinic, a good laugh has great short-term effects. When you start to laugh, it doesn't just lighten your load mentally, it actually induces physical changes in your body.

Laughter can:

- **Stimulate many organs.** Laughter enhances your intake of oxygen-rich air, stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles, and increases the endorphins that are released by your brain.
- **Activate and relieve your stress response.** A rollicking laugh fires up and then cools down your stress response, and it can increase your heart rate and blood pressure.
- **Soothe tension.** Laughter can also stimulate circulation and aid muscle relaxation, both of which can help reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress.

Laughter isn't just a quick pick-me-up, though. It's also good for you over the long term. Laughter may:



- **Improve your immune system.** Negative thoughts manifest into chemical reactions that can affect your body by bringing more stress into your system and decreasing your immunity. In contrast, positive thoughts can actually release neuropeptides that help fight stress and potentially more-serious illnesses.
- **Relieve pain.** Laughter may ease pain by causing the body to produce its own natural painkillers.
- **Increase personal satisfaction.** Laughter can also make it easier to cope with difficult situations. It also helps you connect with other people.
- **Improve your mood.** Many people experience depression, sometimes due to chronic illnesses. Laughter can help lessen your depression and anxiety and may make you feel happier.

Humor can be learned. In fact, developing or refining your sense of humor may be easier than you think.

- **Put humor on your horizon.** Find a few simple items, such as photos, greeting cards or comic strips, that make you chuckle. Then hang them up at home or in your office. Keep funny movies, books or comedy albums on hand for when you need an added humor boost.
- **Laugh and the world laughs with you.** Find a way to laugh about your own situations and watch your stress begin to fade away. Even if it feels forced at first, practice laughing. It does your body good.
- **Share a laugh.** Make it a habit to spend time with friends who make you laugh. And then return the favor by sharing funny stories or jokes with those around you.



Laughter is the best medicine.

Go ahead and give it a try. Turn the corners of your mouth up into a smile and then give a laugh, even if it feels a little forced. Once you've had your chuckle, take stock of how you're feeling. Are your muscles a little less tense? Do you feel more relaxed or buoyant? That's the natural wonder of laughing at work.



Send me your favorite joke and then look for it in the next newsletter!

Loss and Grief in Caregiving



Over 25% of households in the United States are involved in caring for an older adult. Being able to take care of your loved one in their older years is a joy and an honor.

But caregivers also know that their job is not always joyful, or easy! In fact, there is a lot of loss associated with caregiving. Some of the more obvious things that caregivers lose are jobs/careers, social interactions, free time and often their own well-being. Other losses are less clear, like when you are feeling sadness and grief but can't quite explain exactly what it's all about. For example, you may feel like you have already lost your loved one even though they are still alive. This ambiguous loss is particularly difficult to overcome because it is often brushed aside as not being real.

I'm sure all caregivers will agree that they have experienced various losses as a result of their caregiving role. Most of these losses are unavoidable and must be faced. Some common responses to grief associated with these losses are anger and frustration, shock and denial, disorganization, helplessness and fear, guilt and regret, sadness, and fatigue. The most important thing is that the caregiver recognizes their losses and how they are responding, and then allows themselves to grieve.

How does a person grieve? Let yourself express all of the emotions you are feeling. Find a private time and space to gather memories and savor that which was lost. Write in a journal. Take care of your health. Stay in touch with friends or find a therapist or support group where you feel safe to share your feelings. Say "goodbye" to life as you knew it and say "hello" to your life as it is now.

The phrases "work through your grief" and "learn to let go" are common, giving the impression that the sadness and pain of your loss will end one day. But some grief and sadness will never completely go away. Living under the impression that you can somehow make your pain and grief disappear may be setting yourself up to fail. Dealing with loss is not forgetting that which you have lost, but learning how to integrate those losses into your life and move forward. It has been said, "You never get over a loss; you just get different."

One last suggestion to all of you hardworking caregivers: **Give yourself a pat on the back for all that you do.** Treat yourself to lunch with friends, a few hours doing your favorite hobby, a manicure or massage. You have definitely earned it. And remember, you are admired by many for your dedication and selflessness. Keep up the good work!

Adapted from an article by Jane Mahoney Older Americans Act Consultant Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources



The ADRC has new free programs that can bring activities and technology to the home of someone caring for a person with dementia.

To get your free *personalized* music and activities, call the ADRC and ask for "Music and Memory" or "Support to Stay at Home".

Now available thru the  **ADRC**
Aging & Disability Resource Center
of Dodge County